

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks on Presenting the Commander in Chief's Trophy to the United States Air Force Academy Falcons

April 28, 2023

The President. Gentlemen, please have a seat. Thank you.

Well, good afternoon, everyone. You probably heard we've got a ball club here today. And it's great to welcome the Falcons and so many of their fans to the White House for this ceremony.

That includes our Second Gentleman, Doug, and our Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Mark Milley. He played hockey. *[Laughter]* And you wouldn't want to screw around if any of you had your uniform on, I don't think.

But I'd also like to—*[laughter]*—I'd also like to welcome the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Charles Brown. Charles, stand up so everybody can see you. This is your team. All right. And the Vice Chief of Space Operations, General Davis *[David; White House correction]* Thompson. General, stand up so they can see you.

Representative Don Davis is here, a proud graduate of the Academy. Congratulations, ole' buddy.

Lieutenant General Richard Clark, Superintendent of the Air Force Academy. Where—where is—there you are. Get up there, man. When I met the team, I thought he was the middle linebacker. *[Laughter]* You're looking good, General. *[Laughter]*

You know, I played a little football growing up in high school; I wasn't bad. In college, I was bad. *[Laughter]* But I learned so much about teamwork and respect from my coaches and—and just like you fellas did.

And, Coach Calhoun, it's an honor to have you here. It really is an honor to have you here. And in fact, you've been here for this trophy so often I think they're going to start calling it—the Blue Room—"Long Blue Line" Room trophy. *[Laughter]*

In a few weeks, I'll be headed to your home turf for commencement—you're going to get stuck with me being your commencement speaker—and where 10 of these cadets behind me will officially become officers in the United States Air Force and Space Force.

About 65 years ago, during the first remarks to the first class of the Air Force Academy, President Eisenhower—I wasn't there—President—*[laughter]*—no matter what the press says. *[Laughter]* But President Eisenhower said, and I quote, "The basic soul of what you establish now will live on." End of quote. "The basic soul . . . will live on."

Well, what is that soul? I believe the soul is the breath, the life, and the essence of who we are. The soul is what makes us "us." Simply put, you can't talk about the soul of the Nation without talking about our service academies. And I believe that. And you can't talk about the service academies without talking about duty, teamwork, service, and excellence. That's all about you.

Five All-Americans, 15 bowl wins, and now 21 Commander in Chief Trophies. And I expect you to carry it home, Coach. *[Laughter]* You see it over there? That's—you know, that trophy is bigger than the Super Bowl trophy. *[Laughter]* No, it really is. So you may need help carrying it. But at any rate.

More than any other Academy. With stats like that, you might assume that you'd all end up here today, that it was inevitable. But you knew it wasn't inevitable. You knew how the hard work and teamwork and having each other's backs—how much it would take to keep this legacy leaving—living on.

And so, by game day, play by play, you ground it out together. You beat Navy. You beat Army. You beat Colorado for good measure—[*laughter*—just to let them know who—whose State it really was.

And after looking at the scoreboard, they must have been thinking you took your service motto—"Aim High," "Always Above"—pretty seriously. And at home, on the road, you also broke record after record. The number-one defensive team in the Nation by yards allowed. Pretty darn impressive, man. And the number-one rushing offense in the Nation, averaging over 300 yards a game. As they say in Delaware, "You done good, kid." [*Laughter*] That is pretty impressive—300 yards a game.

And how about a fullback and cocaptain in Brad Roberts who became the first ever to win the national rushing title. Congratulations, buddy.

Or quarterback and cocaptain Haaziq Daniels, who set two school records: one for the longest run from the line of scrimmage, 94 yards. As a quarterback, they must have been really chasing you, man. [*Laughter*] And the second: the longest completed pass, 92 yards. That ain't bad. I'd—[*applause*].

Folks, or offensive lineman Isaac Cochran who became the Academy's first All-American player in 30 years. Isaac, where are you? There you go, pal. And, Isaac, if I say anything you don't like, let me know ahead of time, will you? [*Laughter*] Congratulations, buddy. That's incredible.

And on top of all this, you defeated the Baylor Bears in the Armed Forces Bowl, the coldest bowl game ever, just 11 degrees. I don't know how you all set that up, but you did it well. [*Laughter*] Or as you call it in Colorado Springs, a balmy spring day. [*Laughter*]

You had all those wins while drilling, training, and serving day in and day out at the Academy as cadets. After every game, you hung up your uniform and you immediately put on another one representing your Nation, the United States of America.

Simply put, you've not only carried on the Academy's football traditions, you've stepped up to join a long line of American servicemembers, each a link in a chain of honor—each one.

And you know that when it comes—when you—when you do become officers, that it's the team that matters most. You continue to have each other's backs. An Air Force team, a Space Force team. Together, you represent the very best of who we are as Americans, and that's not hyperbole.

Your school motto—if I take a little liberty with it—you put integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all you do. In all you do. That's not only your school motto, it's who you are. It's who you are: proud not only to have achieved, but all that you can do if you continue to work together. That's who you are. That is why you're the soul.

And like President Eisenhower said all those years ago, that soul will now live on another generation thanks to you and all our brave servicemembers and their families.

So as your Commander in Chief, it's my honor to award you the Commander in Chief's Trophy.

As I said, Coach, why don't you show people how you can pick up, hold it over your head for a while? [*Laughter*] And I said, it's bigger than the Super Bowl trophy.

It's pretty incredible, isn't it?

Head Coach Troy Calhoun. Yes, sir.

The President. I know it's not the first time you've seen it. *[Laughter]*

So congratulations. And one more thing: "Let's Fly!" "Let's Fly!"

May God bless you all, and may God bless all our airmen and graduates. And of a particular thanks to your families.

And now I'm going to hand this over to Coach Calhoun to say a few words. Coach, you can use either mike. Congratulations.

Coach Calhoun. Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, how grateful we are, and it's all of us. I mean, truly, the remarkable leadership of our Superintendent, his wife—Lieutenant General Rich Clark and Amy—the fantastic standard that they set there at the Academy, their inspiration, their principles, their discipline, but most of all, just their day in, day out commitment to our young men and young women there at the United States Air Force Academy.

On behalf of our Athletic Director, Mr. Nathan Pine, and the entire United States Air Force Academy, how fortunate we are to have great, great support, not only in here with—within the confines of Washington, DC, but throughout our Nation. And unequivocally, we already have 10 that have graduated that are out doing splendid things in both our Air and our Space Force. And hopefully real soon, here in 4½ weeks, we have 10 more that will serve and serve so, so well.

And it's our honor to be here, but even more so, it's our honor to serve the greatest Nation in the world, the United States of America.

And at this time, I'm going to bring up—now, he's from New Jersey, not Delaware.

The President. That's good. I married a Jersey girl. *[Laughter]*

Coach Calhoun. Oh, okay. *[Laughter]*

Our two captains: Haaziq Daniels, quarterback, and running back Brad Roberts. And, sir, they have a couple of small items here for you.

[At this point, the President was presented with a team jersey, football, and helmet.]

The President. Whoa.

Where I'm going tonight, I may need that helmet. *[Laughter]*

Go down, out, and down. Okay?

[The President pretended to pass the football.]

[Laughter] Well, thank you very much. What a great, great honor. I appreciate it very much. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:36 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala D. Harris.

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